

A close-up photograph of Frank Sportolari, President of AmCham Germany, speaking into a microphone. He is wearing a grey suit jacket, a light blue shirt, and a red tie with a small black pattern. He has white hair and is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

An industrial strategy for Germany: **transat- lantic partnership is key**

INTERVIEW WITH FRANK SPORTOLARI,
PRESIDENT OF AMCHAM GERMANY

Minister Peter Altmaier recently presented the National Industrial Strategy 2030 — a paper that sparked many discussions, including at AmCham Germany.

At the beginning of February Minister Altmaier revealed his National Industrial Strategy 2030. What were your initial thoughts on it?

In the postwar era, Germany has developed a robust industrial economy without an articulated industrial strategy. The world's best vocational education system produces a highly skilled workforce. We have good universities and world-class R&D. Germany is fortunate to have a central location in Europe with good ports. There is an excellent, albeit aging, physical infrastructure and a stable political environment. And we have something uniquely German that has been a key part of the success story: The many family companies throughout the country — the famous *Mittelstand*. An industrial policy should leverage those strengths.

Do you see these strengths in Minister Altmaier's strategy?

The very word "national" causes me some concern. Germany has been successful because its companies dedicated themselves to serving global markets very early on. Europe trades to a large degree within its own borders, with the US being the most important overseas market.

The best thing that could be done to help German companies continue to flourish would be to work on strengthening the single market within the EU and negotiating a trade agreement with the US.

Selecting individual sectors to promote or creating national champions should not be priorities. German companies have shown very clearly they can compete and succeed when competition is fair.

Do you see any specific areas that need more attention?

I already mentioned the physical infrastructure — quite simply, we have to invest more in that. Believe me, as CEO of a transportation company I see every day the impact of our failure to have maintained and furthered our roads, bridges, railways and even airports.

For the future, it's essential we ramp up investments in our digital infrastructure. We have fallen behind in this key area and are among the least

digitally equipped countries in Europe. To enable our small and medium-sized companies — the backbone of the economy — to remain competitive, fiber-optic cable needs to reach every address in the country. The 5G auctions should not exclusively focus on raising money; they should also ensure an operator will be chosen that will provide the best possible coverage and service.

The national industrial strategy is not yet finalized. Which perspectives need to be considered during the consultation process?

First, it's essential that the *Mittelstand* is included. These are the companies that really have built Germany's reputation for quality, innovation and excellence throughout the world.

Second, Minister Altmaier needs to consider a broad range of opinions before finalizing his plans. When it comes to the transatlantic piece, we are the best source of expertise and I hope the Minister seriously considers our positions as outlined in our recent position paper. The transatlantic relationship should be one of the guideposts of any economic policy decisions made in Germany.

A group of policy committee members developed a position paper which points out central measures that should be included in an industrial strategy for Germany. We talked to Frank Sportolari at the end of April, shortly before the position paper was handed over to Minister Altmaier at the beginning of May.

The position paper can be downloaded from AmCham Germany's website www.amcham.de

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